



NEWSLETTER

March 2024

President's Message



Happy new year! Yes, I know that it is March and Spring is just a few weeks away (on paper anyway), but the month of March heralds not only the imminent reopening of your Bennington Museum, but the beginning of the Bennington Historical Society's year of lectures, talks, and presentations.

The museum is getting off to a great start with the unveiling of a newly updated, expanded, and fully reinstalled Grandma Moses Gallery. At the core of the reinstallation will be five masterpieces by Moses that have newly been acquired from the Kallir Research Institute. These new works, alongside other highlights from the Museum's Moses collection, constitute the largest public collection of her work in the world.

In addition to its nationally recognized permanent exhibits, the museum will be offering many events and programs such as the Bennington Project Independence Artists Reception, the annual Antiques Appraisal Fair, and popular Music at the Museum concerts.

The volunteers at the Bennington Historical Society are busy at work with a number of projects including the BHS Reading Program, "Celebrating 250 Years: The American Dream Revisited," a reading list supporting the 250th Anniversary of Vermont. Work is well

underway on two other publications: A new book, in collaboration with the Museum, exploring Bennington's role in the Revolutionary War, and the new, expanded edition of Tom Fel's Poets & Pioneers. And as ever, we make constant improvements to the Regional History Room.

"The museum is getting off to a great start with the unveiling of a newly updated, expanded, and fully reinstalled Grandma Moses Gallery"

BHS has also scheduled a year's worth of informative and insightful historical presentations including the Kelley family of Kelley Stand Road, "Daisy Turner's Kin," and "Moses Robinson and the Birth of Democracy in Early Vermont."

We will also hold a talk called "Vermont for the Vermonters," with Mercedes de Guardiola. The event takes its title from de Guardiola's recent book about the eugenics movement in our state. Although this disturbing look into a dark chapter of Vermont's history is, in fact, our first presentation (March 17th), I mention it last to highlight the importance of the absolute need to always keep ourselves aware of our past, no matter how painful or unpleasant it may be.

2024 is shaping up to be a pivotal year in our country's history. As a nation we are poised to make decisions which may well lead down a grim and destructive road. Only by being conscious of and learning from the mistakes of our past will we be able to ensure that a government of the people, by the people, and for the people does not perish from the earth.

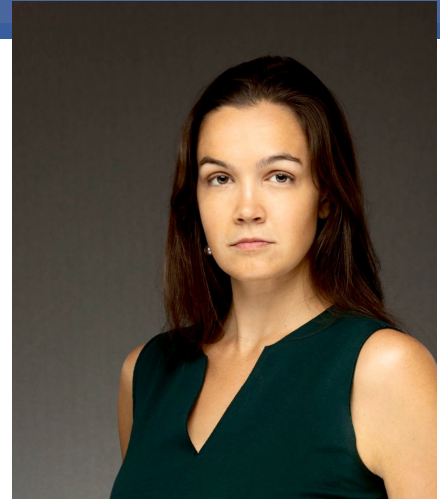
— Robert Ebert

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

March 17, 2024, 2pm

Vermont for the Vermonters

Our speaker, Mercedes de Guardiola, will take us to a difficult period in Vermont's history. Her book, *Vermont for the Vermonters: The History of Eugenics in the Green Mountain State*, discusses how our state adopted a pseudo-scientific theory of human breeding called eugenics, one that deeply influenced state policy. Those policies resulted in family separations, institutionalization, and, often, sterilization. It's an idea we find repugnant today, but eugenics held great influence among thought leaders and politicians as recently as the 1930s. We look forward to de Guardiola's revelations about the course of this troubling passage in Vermont history.



Courtesy of Mercedes de Guardiola

Author Mercedes de Guardiola

April 21, 2024, 2pm

The Kelleys: The Story Behind the Kelley Hotel and Kelley Stand Road

Avis Hayden will help us learn about the family whose name is familiar to us now from Kelley Stand Road, but whose work in our area included logging and running a boarding house that later became a popular hotel. Avis, a descendant in the Kelley family line, volunteers in our museum's Regional History Room.

May 19, 2:00pm

Daisy Turner's Kin

Vermont folklorist Jane Beck shares the story of the Turner family, a multi-generational saga spanning two centuries, and three continents. The Turner family story was related to Jane Beck by Daisy Turner, who learned them from her father, Alec Turner. The Turner family's captivating narrative sweeps through the early 19th century British-African trade, shipwreck, the birth of a biracial child, enslavement, plantation life and escape, the Civil War, migration north, battling racism, buying land and settling on a hilltop in Vermont that became a family center. Daisy also shared her own life story, a powerful and rare account of the African American experience in New England from the 1880s forward.

June 16, 2:00pm

Moses Robinson and the Birth of Democracy in Early Vermont

A member of the first family to settle in Bennington, Moses Robinson served as our town clerk for 20 years, then as governor, then Vermont's first U.S. senator, and chief justice of the state Supreme Court. Robert Mello's biography of Robinson is one of Vermont's most important. Mr. Mello will discuss Robinson's role in promoting democracy, the sanctity of the rule of law, the independence of the courts, and the inviolability of elections — all subjects of immediate importance today. Mr. Mello is an author and a retired Vermont Superior Court Judge.

Courtesy of Vermont Folklife



the view from the RIFR

by David Pilachowski

The Regional History Room is selectively adding books to enrich our collection, with works on Bennington, Vermont, New England, and New York history of particular interest. If your shelves are overflowing, consider donating books to our library.

Got a book to donate, but wondering if we already have it? Just go to our catalog at bennington.pastperfectonline.com/Search. Search by author, title, or subject to check our collection.

Some recent donations we received from Ruth Burt Ekstrom and the Bennington Historical Society, in memory of Ted Bird:

Brands, H. W. *Our First Civil War: Patriots and Loyalists in the American Revolution*. 973.3 BRA

Dublin, Thomas. *Women at Work: the transformation of work and community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860*. 974.41 Lowell DUB

Howard, Russell S. *A Long, Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Farming in New England*. 338.10974 RUS

Lepore, Jill. *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*. 973.24 LEP

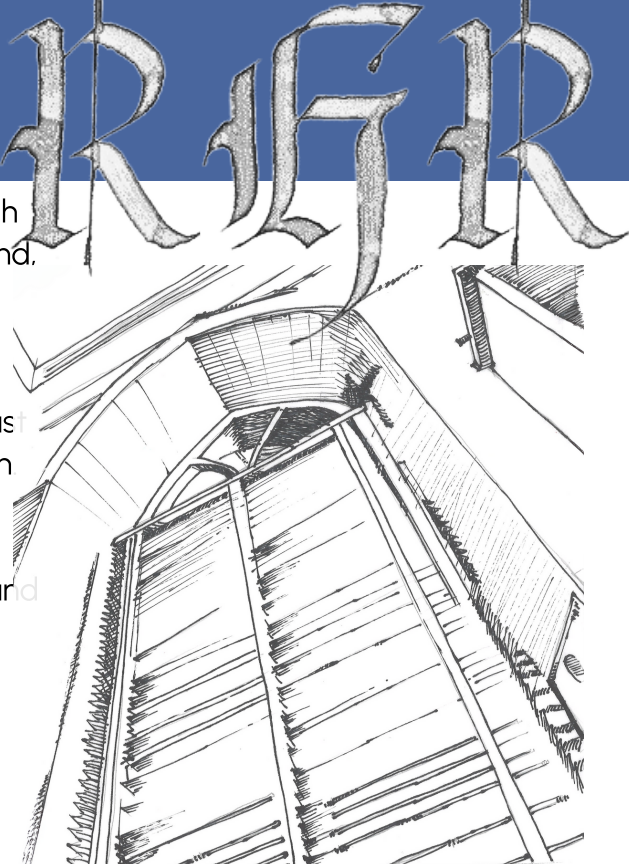
Morison, Samuel Eliot. *The Story of the "Old Colony" of New Plymouth, 1620-1692*. 974.41 New Plymouth MOR

Randall, Caitlin. *Sonny's Blue Benn: Feeding the Soul of a Vermont Town*. 974.31 Bennington RAN

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*. 974.03 ULR

Van Buskirk, Judith L. *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York*. 973.34471 VAN

Vermont Almanac: *Stories from & for the Land*. 974.3 VA Volumes 1-3

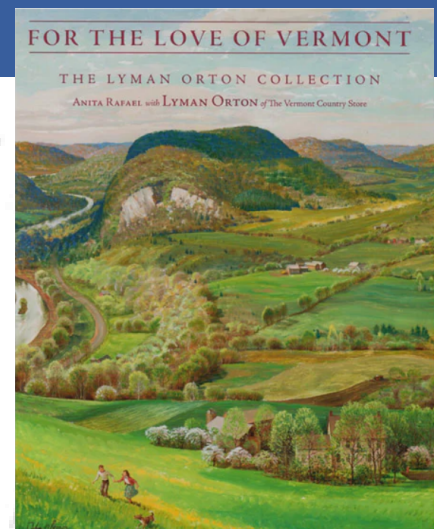


FOR THE LOVE OF VERMONT: INDEX NOW AVAILABLE

Freedom & Unity, searchable!

by Bob Tegart

This summer's major joint exhibit, "For the Love of Vermont," based on Lyman Orton's collection of art from the Green Mountain state, drew large audiences to Bennington Museum and the Southern Vermont Art Center. Many who saw the exhibit also purchased the accompanying book. This high-quality tome deserved a thorough index, and now, thanks to trustee David Pilachowski, it has one. The six-page guide lists the exhibit's subject matter by artist, subject, and artwork name. To obtain a copy, go to docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1kMdY4hDzjk3NxYrBBA_RIX1VeGfsi-RbSjwplfElsbQ/edit?usp=sharing, or contact David Pilachowski at: david.pilachowski10@gmail.com.



HISTORY NEVER HIBERNATES

The Regional History Room is always on

by Bob Tegart

The Museum is closed for the winter, but work goes on in the Regional History Room. We're forging ahead on several projects. If you'd like to help, give us a shout – we could use more volunteers to complete these projects.

For example, we have this collection of audio cassettes, VHS tapes, and DVDs -- all outmoded technology. Should we keep them? Are they worth transferring to digital? We're a bit stumped.

The VHS tapes and DVDs are recordings of BHS meetings from the 1980s and '90s. We would welcome our members to have a look and advise us of the value. Who are the presenters? Are these presentations worth saving? Do you have recollections about them?

We also uncovered three boxes of material about covered bridges in Vermont and surrounding states. They contain photographs from the 1930s to the '60s, and well as engineering drawings. Quite a collection! Be sure to stop in and enjoy the Regional History Room's many treasures.

Want to look into the Bennington area's history? Or just browse our collection? Drop a line: library@benningtonmuseum.org

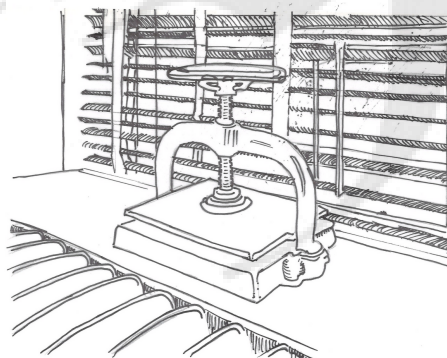
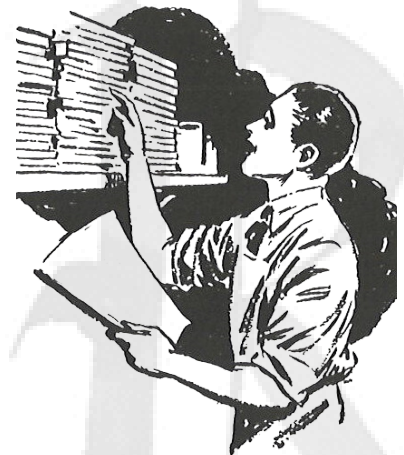
DESPERATELY SEEKING VERMONT LIFE

Help us out here, eh?

by David Pilachowski

Vermont Life played a major role in shaping people's impressions of our state. Loaded with insightful writing, the magazine's quarterly issues also featured beautiful photography. The publication is regularly consulted by our curators and researchers, so we'd like to have a complete set of back issues. Once we do, we can also bind and preserve them for future readers.

But over 70 issues are currently missing from the Regional History Room collection, particularly those from the 1940s and 50s. We have few issues from the span between 1973 and 1974, and fewer still from 2015 and later. If you have issues *Vermont Life* you no longer need, please contact us at library@benningtonmuseum.org.



CALLING ALL CATAMOUNTS!

Are you a Ben-Hi alumn? Share your story

by Tony Marro

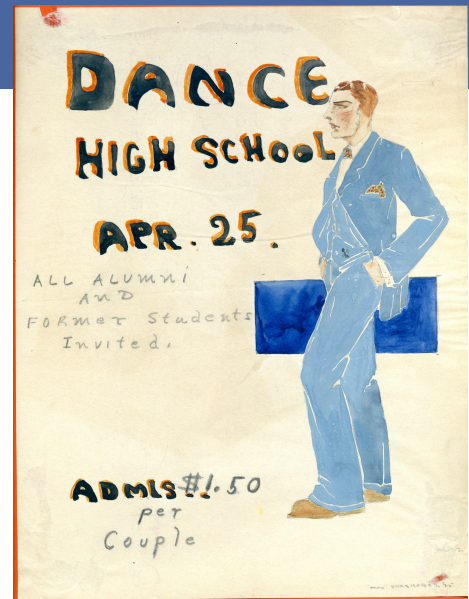
More than a decade ago, when Beverly Petrelis realized that there was no mention of the old Bennington high schools in the new Mount Anthony Union High School building, she and others arranged to get a display cabinet installed in the halls of MAUHS. In it they placed many photographs and artifacts from Ben-Hi (as it was called then) and Bennington Catholic High School. And BHS member Jackie Marro also filmed interviews with alumni for a program that was played on CAT-TV.

The Hale Corporation is now transforming the old Ben-Hi building into a residential and commercial complex that will include apartments, a gym, the town Senior Center, and Meals on Wheels. And the company is looking to install a large display to illustrate Ben-Hi's history, dating back to its opening in 1913, up through 1967, when the last class graduated from its halls.

They're looking for photographs, mementos, and short biographies of some of the many folks who went to school there. One name you may be familiar with: Carleton Carpenter, the actor, songwriter, and author, who graduated from the school in the early 1940s. But they're also looking for graduates who served with distinction in state and local government, and in the armed forces, or led otherwise remarkable lives.

Do you have pictures, keepsakes, or interviews about what Ben-Hi was like? Or do you know someone who does? Jackie Marro will record some of the interviews and put together a documentary about the school that will include these oral histories.

Anyone who has memorabilia they'd like to donate, or who would like to get involved in the oral history project should contact Jackie Marro at jcminvt@hotmail.com.



Bennington Museum Collection, gift of Elizabeth Vernon

Styling and profiling

This dandy was drawn by Mary Shakshober, Ben-Hi '24



Bennington Museum Collection

"Cross my palm with silver" was a whole vibe

Ben-Hi's varsity fortune-telling squad of 1925

HILAND HALL EXPOSES FRAUD IN CONGRESS

Rep. Hall suffers no spurious sailors

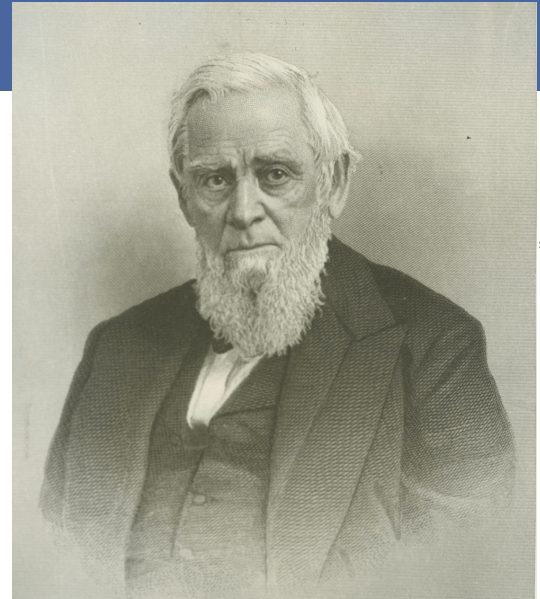
by Tyler Resch

While he was in the U.S. Congress, representing Vermont's First Congressional District (Bennington and Windham counties), Hiland Hall dealt with many public issues, but one stands out that illustrates his integrity, persistence, sense of humor, and more than a hint of antipathy toward his colleagues south of the Mason-Dixon line.

The issue involved a series of Revolutionary War pension claims brought by Virginia residents against the federal government. On Dec. 30, 1839, Hall was named to chair a commission to investigate the validity of the pension claims and was authorized to adjudicate any payments. The investigation dragged on for four years and produced some heated oratory, behavior uncharacteristic of Congressman Hall of Vermont.

After meticulous study, and in the face of fiery criticism from his Virginia colleagues, Hall ultimately proved that all of the claims were worthless. While the probe neared completion, Hall wrote to his wife, Dolly, back in North Bennington, that his report on the Virginia claims "will be as interesting – or at least a considerable portion of it will – as a book of police reports – being much of it a recital of individual cases of fraud. It will make a 'right smart stir' in Virginia. That state has already got over three millions of dollars from Uncle Sam and is now asking for hundreds of thousands more."

Hall found that the evidence showed that the so-called "Virginia claims" were a swindle in which agents promised to "locate" one's Revolutionary War ancestors for a fee that amounted to 40 to 50 percent of the reward that was expected from the federal treasury. "I came to the conclusion," Hall wrote Dolly in February 1840, "that even supposing the claims [are] all



Bennington Museum Collection

Hiland, warrior

Don't make Rep. Hiland Hall call you out by name.

good against Virginia, the U.S. are under no obligation to pay them."

A sample of Hall's most witty and even emotional oratory demonstrates a skill with which he could assemble words, convey the thrust of an argument, and skewer his opponents. On the floor of the House on June 16, 1842, he said:

"I wish now, Mister Speaker, to call your attention, and that of the House, to the bounties which have been granted to the Virginia State Navy. Gentlemen need not feel particularly mortified if they have never before heard of the State navy of Virginia. As an apology for their ignorance, I would inform them that its history yet remains to be written. I have taken much pains to inform myself in regard to it, but have not been very successful. The fullest account I can find of it is in Jefferson's Notes on Virginia, written in 1781, and corrected where necessary in 1782. I will read all that he says."

Hall quoted from Thomas Jefferson:

"Marine Force. – Before the present invasion of this State by the British under the command of General Philips, we had three vessels of 16 guns

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HILAND HALL EXPOSES FRAUD IN CONGRESS

(continued)

each, one of fourteen guns, five small galleys and two or three armed boats. They were generally so badly manned as seldom to be in condition for service. Since the perfect possession of our rivers assumed by the enemy, I believe we are left with a single armed boat only."

Hall continued:

"I am not familiar with naval service, and cannot pretend to speak confidently of the number of officers which would be required for the force described by Mr. Jefferson, but suppose twenty-seven captains and lieutenants to be a very fair complement of officers. And how many do you suppose, Mr. Speaker, have been allowed the land bounty? I will inform you, sir. The bounty has been allowed two commodores, each for over six years' service, to thirty captains, and sixty lieutenants, making in the whole ninety-two officers. Allowing one captain and two lieutenants to each galley, and one lieutenant to each boat, which I suppose an ample number, there remain six captains and twelve lieutenants for each of the four brigs and sloops. Though Mr. Jefferson says the vessels were very badly manned, yet it would seem from the list of bounties that they must have been very well officered."

Hall persisted for several more pages, proving that the total number of officers' allowances in the Virginia navy, instead of being twenty-seven, had been inflated to 268, of which 176 allowances had been made since the passage of the first scrip act of 1830. He kept pressing

his point, quoting from public records. In one instance, he hauled out a large manuscript volume that he said contained eleven different and independent lists of Virginia officers of the Revolutionary War from 1776 to 1783, taken from records of the Pension Office and the papers of George Washington, all indexed. He proceeded to go through the list alphabetically, which must have bored other House members as thoroughly as it nettled the Virginians who were perpetrating the fraud.

In a speech just a week later, on June 25, 1842, Hall reported further:

"For the performance of what I believe to be my duty in regard to these bounty land claims – a duty imposed on me, in some degree by the House – the gentleman from Virginia (Rep. Thomas W. Gilmer) has thought proper to represent me as acting the part of a hyena, prowling among the tombs of the Virginia revolutionary dead, seeking to expose their remains to the public gaze. Sir, it is not I who have sought to disturb the rest of the quiet dead. No Sir, no. It is the gentleman himself who has violated the sanctity of the tomb. It is the claimants and speculators who, encouraged by his course of action, have gone into the graveyards of Virginia, raked from the tombs the bones of their ancestors, and brought them here to barter away for money and land."

A newspaper clipping, the source now lost, reported the matter's resolution:

"Hall... spoke for an hour... against the bill then pending in the House on the Virginia claims. He said every one of them was fraudulent and offered to abandon his opposition to the claims if any member from Virginia, or any other state, would select... any single claim... and satisfy the House that it was well founded."

HILAND HALL EXPOSES FRAUD IN CONGRESS

(continued)

Several Virginians spoke at length, but they tended to steer away from the substance of the argument and instead heaped invective upon Hiland Hall. None dared to validate a single claim.

He seemed to stand up well to the harassment. A plausible reason for Rep. Gilmer's vehement opposition to Hall was that Gilmer stood to gain a percentage of whatever claims were to be paid by the federal treasury.

Steel-framed, no-nonsense, corrective
Rep. Hall's eyeglasses shared three crucial qualities with their wearer



Bennington Museum Collection

Postscript: In 1844 Gilmer, who was Secretary of the Navy, was killed, along with Secretary of State Abel Upshur and four others in the explosion of the three-masted USS Princeton, a Navy steamship, during a demonstration of its firepower. President John Tyler was aboard, belowdecks, but remained uninjured.



Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USZC2-3201

Tragedy on the Potomac

The USS Princeton's enormous new deckgun, designed by the ship's captain, was dubbed "The Peacemaker." When the weapon exploded, it killed six onlookers instantly and injured more than a dozen.

BHS READING PROGRAM

God, War, and Providence: The Epic Struggle of Roger Williams and the Narragansett Indians Against the Puritans of New England, by James A. Warren

Review by Don Miller

February is the second month in the Bennington Historical Society's four-year Book of the Month Reading Program, "The American Dream Revisited."

Designed to track the 250th anniversary celebrations of the founding of our nation and state, the program launched in January with *Seeds of Discontent* by J. Revell Carr.

Our book for February, James A. Warren's *God, War, and Providence*, progresses naturally along our state's long path to inclusion in the nascent United States.

Seeds of Discontent traced the historic relationship between England and her most energetic colonial enterprise. Carr described the relationship as one of "benign neglect." But often the relationship seemed to be one of "malign self-interest"—with England pulling the strings whenever her European enterprises needed additional revenue. The tension between "neglect" and "self-interest" finally spun out of its uneasy orbit in the mid-1750s.

God, War, and Providence looks at the factors at work between new and native residents of the land that would come to be known as the United States. It traces the internal tensions between colonial leaders and their indigenous neighbors. And it makes clear that neither the colonists nor their neighbors were a homogenous collection of friends and enemies.

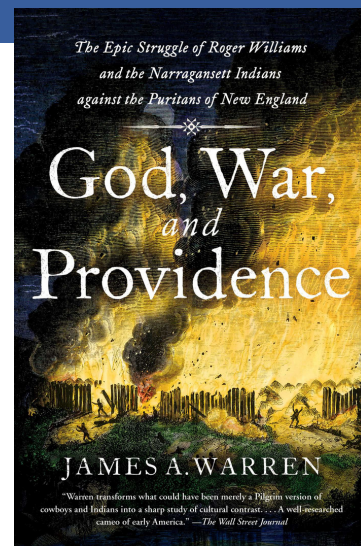
The book focuses on New England. Each colony had its own geographic and cultural boundaries, and developed its own economy and traditions. But the colonial leaders of each were predominantly civic-

and ecclesiastically-minded servants of the people. They worked with Crown-appointed Royal Governors to establish laws and maintain order in each colony, but local civic officers mainly represented immigrants, and focused on building new communities.

William Bradford of Plymouth, and John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, led their respective settlements. Warren describes the differences between Plymouth's Pilgrims and the Bay Colony's Puritans in their approach to separation of church and state, the development of community, and the basics of Christianity. In the end, the Bay Colony's Puritan model followed the movement westward into Connecticut, western Massachusetts, and finally Vermont.

Puritan minister Thomas Hooker led 100 members of his congregation from Boston to Hartford in 1636, and there wrote the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, America's first Constitution. The pioneers of Vermont came through this branch.

Roger Williams, a vocal critic of the Puritan intolerances in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was banned from Boston and led his followers to what is now the Providence area of Rhode Island. There, Williams acquired several parcels of land from the Narragansetts, the largest of New England's native tribes. Williams



Courtesy of Simon & Schuster

(continued on page 10)

objected to both the Puritan church's rigid restrictions on its own parishioners, and the Bay Colony's approach to the Narragansetts and their lands. He founded America's first Baptist Church.

These ecclesiastical leaders formed their own hierarchies. Although they may have looked to the Church of England for reference, they quickly established their own sense of order. The resulting Cambridge Agreement codified expectations for local churches.

Native American groups had their own relationships, of course, not only with traders from abroad, but with other indigenous villages, tribes and nations. Most relationships were friendly, but proximity inevitably led to friction. Not unexpectedly, with ever-more-prevalent European colonists competing for land and resources, native groups aligned their loyalties according to their own advantage.

King Philip's War broke out in Rhode Island in 1675 and spread throughout southern New England, splitting indigenous tribes along fissures old and new. "King Philip," or Metacom, was the son of Massasoit, the great sachem of the Wampanoags. Metacom and an alliance of native bands fought bloody battles that raged up the Connecticut River to Deerfield, Turners Falls, and Northfield in Massachusetts. Warren describes the "roots of the conflict" and its consequences on the Narragansetts and New England.

For more information on the BHS Reading Program, go to the Program's page on the Bennington Museum website : benningtonmuseum.org/programming-events/bennington-historical-society/the-bhs-reading-program/



Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, New York Public Library.

Known, feared, revered
Called King Philip by newly-arrived Europeans, Metacom was the scion of Massasoit, leader of the Wampanoags. When Roger Williams' negotiations failed, Metacom led native bands against colonists in the conflagration known as King Philip's War



About the BHS

The Bennington Historical Society is volunteer-operated program of Bennington Museum based in the Regional History Room. Meetings take place on the first Monday of every month from 4:00 to 5:00pm, but we encourage you to stop by the Regional History Room during our open hours to say hello and talk about projects that you might like to be involved in.

The Regional History Room is open Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday afternoons, 1-4pm (by appointment when the Museum is closed January-March: library@benningtonmuseum.org).



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Make a gift to the BHS today to help keep our programming and newsletters free and frequent this coming year!

75 Main Street, Bennington, VT 05201
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BHS programming is made possible in part thanks to support from:

